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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [IT](#) [AFGHANISTAN](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: GETTING TO YES ON AN ITALIAN-LED AFGHAN FSB

REF: A. ROME 960

- [1](#)B. ROME 927
- [1](#)C. ROME 860
- [1](#)D. ROME 798
- [1](#)E. ROME 668
- [1](#)F. MULTIPLE E-MAILS

Classified By: DCM EMIL SKODON, REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The Government of Italy, at very high levels, has indicated a willingness to contribute more to Afghanistan and to support ISAF expansion beyond Kabul. The Italians concur that rapid action to stabilize Afghanistan is of the highest political priority; they also share our conviction that succeeding in Afghanistan is key to the war on terrorism, regional security, the battle against narcotics, and support for democracy and human rights. They have been consistently willing to contribute a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), since our first request they lead one in Ghazni in November [1](#)2003. They are considering the request to stand up a Forward Support Base (FSB), but have concerns. If we can help them address those concerns, working in coordination with SHAPE and the PRT Executive Steering Committee (ESC), and be specific (and sure) about what we want and where, it increases the likelihood that they can make the significant contribution we -- and they -- want. END SUMMARY.

HISTORY

[1](#)2. (C) In November 2003, the U.S. asked Italy to lead a PRT in Ghazni. In February, the day before Defense Minister Martino was to announce Italy's leadership of the Ghazni PRT, we abruptly asked Italy to steer clear because we determined Ghazni was not ready for transfer to ISAF command. The Italians then coordinated with SHAPE -- as we asked -- to find a new PRT site. As a result of those consultations, they focused on Herat. This week, we told them the Herat PRT should remain under OEF command -- fortunately with a bit of notice. At a March 25 meeting originally called to make a firm decision on the Herat PRT, Prime Minister Berlusconi, Defense Minister Martino, and Foreign Minister Frattini instead determined that Italy would not/not pursue the Herat PRT due to USG concerns.

TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT: IMPEDIMENTS TO AN FSB

[1](#)3. (C) Italy understands the political and historical imperative of success in Afghanistan. The GOI has been with us in Afghanistan from the outset of OEF, and is determined to continue. The GOI at a very high level wants to make a still more significant contribution; the MFA Special Envoy for Afghanistan told us Secretary General Vattani had instructed the MFA to be as forward-leaning on the NATO (SHAPE) request as possible. Under Secretary for Asia Boniver has repeatedly assured us of her Government's political will to do as much as possible in Afghanistan, and specifically to lead a PRT. The political side of the MFA has been cautiously forward-leaning on the FSB, as well -- but they do not control military assets nor maintain the mil-mil relationship with SHAPE. In the end, the Defense Ministry must decide if Italy has the resources to lead an FSB. DefMin Martino is solid politically; he is a stalwart pro-NATO and pro-U.S. member of the Berlusconi Government. But he is also an astute politician, and understands that putting Italian soldiers at risk has to be done in a way that portrays the Government in the best possible light to the electorate.

[1](#)4. (C) The GOI, however, faces political and resource constraints. In Afghanistan, the political constraints are fewer than in Iraq. The Italian public largely supported the war against terrorism and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and continues to do so. The majority in the center-left has not questioned renewal of funding for the continued Italian support to Afghanistan. (In fact, during the recent debate over funding for Italy's military missions abroad, the center-left sought to vote on funding for the Iraq mission separately, so that they would be free to support the remaining missions, including in Afghanistan.) However, the

approach the Government uses toward Parliament and the public emphasizes the civilian aspects of the Afghanistan mission -- nation building, democracy building, institution building,

reconstruction. A civ-mil PRT fits perfectly within this scenario. A purely military FSB is more of a stretch. We may need to emphasize the role the FSB plays in support of PRTs.

15. (C) A more difficult hurdle for the GOI is resources, human, material and financial. A PRT would be financed jointly from MFA and MOD coffers. An FSB, according to Martino's diplomatic adviser, would likely be funded exclusively by the financially-strapped MOD. The Italians are also concerned about the manpower needed for an FSB. The military is near the limit on the number of forces it can deploy abroad. Finally, the GOI has questions about what specific assets are needed for an FSB, and how flexible the requirements on the lead nation are. They have repeatedly worried about their ability to provide enough helicopters and aircraft, for example. These concerns need to be addressed with the Italians. The March 24 meeting between Italian Embassy DCM Stefano Stefanini and DASD Collins may have begun to allay some of the Italian concerns, as we understand Collins reassured Stefanini that the U.S. did not expect a lead nation to be singly responsible for an FSB. Rather, that nation would identify what it could provide and work with SHAPE to identify others to bring additional capability.

16. (C) Perhaps paradoxically, given the greater resource requirement, we think it might be easier for Italy to stand up both a PRT and an FSB, rather than an FSB alone. As noted, civilian-focused reconstruction and democracy building are far more palatable to the Italian public than straight military operations. They are, in general, an easier political sell. A PRT would, we think, bring with it more MFA involvement (and therefore MFA money). We do not suggest that it is guaranteed the Italians would agree to do both, but suggest we remain open to any Italian linkage. We do question whether Italy would be willing to lead a PRT and an FSB in separate locations. For reasons both of economies of scale and security, we presume they would prefer to co-locate any such efforts.

GETTING TO YES

17. (C) The Italians want to do more in Afghanistan. They had planned to announce an Italian-led PRT in Herat at the March 31-April 1 Berlin Conference; it was to be the keystone of Italy's package of deliverables. We think they are disappointed that they will bring to the table "only" a continuation of their approximately 45 million Euro annual financial contribution and ongoing leadership of judicial reform efforts. If an FSB is what Italy could best contribute, we think it's doable. It means, though, that the USG, in coordination with SHAPE and the ESC, must be specific on what we want, what flexibility an FSB lead nation would have, what support the U.S. and/or NATO can give -- and where, precisely, we want the Italians to set up shop. On this last point, in particular, we must give advice that is specific and timely. Delaying action or failing to communicate will only set the stage for failure to get the Italian contributions we want. As it now stands, the Italians understand that an eventual FSB would be based in Herat. We have seen suggestions that SHAPE might prefer a different location. We need to be clear with the Italians on location, the sooner the better.

18. (U) Kabul Minimize Considered.
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